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Letters

'Dangerous Implications' of Tampering With the First Amendment

To the Editor:

Your July 14 editorial attacking us was so unusually vicious and replete with misstatement that it requires a response.

First you assert both that our work in exposing U.S. intelligence abuses, operations and personnel endangers lives and that we do not care. In so doing, you misstate not us, or an outsider, but your own reporter.

Not one of the several thousand C.I.A. personnel exposed by many publications in many countries has been harmed on account of it. Even Admiral Turner has admitted that "this enterprise," as you put it, had nothing to do with the killing of Richard Welch in Athens in 1975. As a number of publications have revealed, Mr. Welch was killed by a group stalking his predecessor shortly after he had moved into his predecessor's home, ignoring cabled warnings from C.I.A. headquarters not to live there.

More significantly, you assert that Mr. Wolf expressed "indifference," that "he doesn't care," and that, "As he told Philip Taubman of The Times, he has no qualms about the fate of individuals." As Mr. Taubman will confirm, Mr. Wolf expressed quite the contrary, noting that he was against violence and abhorred the inflicting of any injury to persons exposed, and pointing out that it had never, in fact, occurred and in any event was totally counterproductive, giving the C.I.A. sympathy and support it does not deserve. Moreover, it diverts attention from the real abuses we are criticizing.

Your outrage over our "mocking" of the First Amendment, even stripped of its arrogance, is quite revealing. Your publication, you assert, should decide what is "valid and necessary reporting" and what constitutes "a legitimate study of the C.I.A." Why

though, is it legitimate for your paper to expose the Pentagon Papers or destabilization by the C.I.A. in Chile, for example, but not legitimate for the Covert Action Information Bulletin to expose destabilization in Jamaica? As Ford Rowan testified before the House Intelligence Committee in January, "The First Amendment wasn't designed to protect The New York Times; it was designed to protect people like Covert Action."

When you say "the United States needs spies abroad; every country employs them," you misrepresent the premises from which we operate. We do not object to intelligence gathering; we object to the covert interference in the affairs of other nations, the refusal to let the people of those nations decide for themselves upon their leaders, their systems of government, and the forms of institutions they desire.

Finally, when you call upon Congress to look for laws that might "get" us, without, of course, "getting" The

Times, your outrage blinds you. There is no such law. Our research involves unclassified material, and no C.I.A. "sources." As the American Civil Liberties Union recently reminded Congress, "no bill which is conceivably constitutional can, in fact, prevent the publication by the Covert Action Information Bulletin ... of the names of C.I.A. officers who are assigned to positions in American embassies."

You believe that what we do is morally wrong; we believe that what we do is morally right. If one wants to urge the C.I.A. to develop better cover, that is one's right, but if one asks Congress to make it a crime for private citizens to publish unclassified information obtained from unclassified sources, that has dangerous implications.

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ELLEN RAY

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As Received